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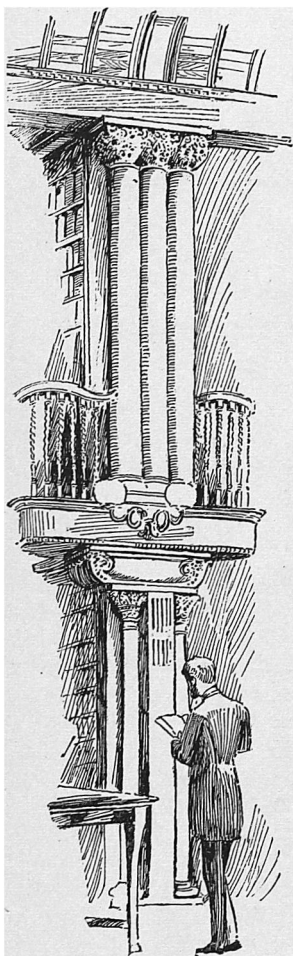
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DECORATION & FURNITURE

RICHARDSON AS AN INTERIOR DESIGNER.



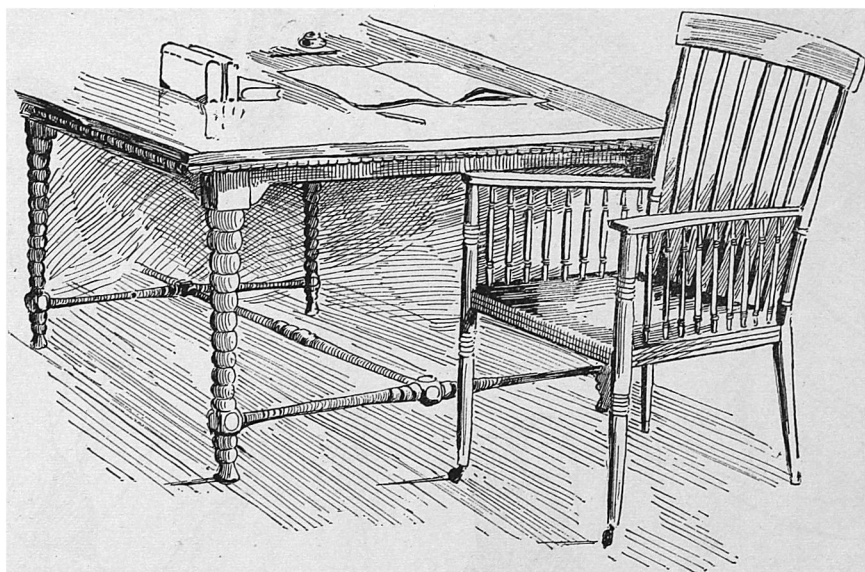
POSTS SEPARATING ALCOVES IN THE CONVERSE LIBRARY.

was progress. In all were seen an extraordinary feeling for the style adopted, an amazing knowledge of its whole detail and system, and a veritable instinct for architecture itself—all these dominated by an intense personality. The death of Richardson, just when his lovers were learning delightedly and reverently to study each fresh work of his hand, revealed the priceless value of the services which he had rendered to his profession. He restored to building, in this country, some great fundamental notions—the wall, the roof, light and shade; he re-taught architectural composition, form and color; he dethroned the follies of the ignorant and the vain, and did much to arrest the direction of architectural practice in his time, and make it the revelation of his own influence. Still, the art which he thus transformed is to-day less Richardsonian than intrinsically noble in its firm foundation upon the elemental principles of power which he so successfully restored to it.

The various estimates of Richardson's genius which have appeared within the past year have dealt chiefly with the external side of this architecture, their authors often contenting themselves with the stereotyped cavil that his interiors were rarely up to his exteriors, and that he apparently was weak in interior design. There are people whose sole mission, seemingly, is to invent or discover the limitations of great men, and who usually argue that because a man is great in one thing, he *must* be small in something else. At the same time, it is true that most of us have been so captivated by Richardson's buildings that we have passed by his interiors, and so gathered a one-sided impression of his powers. Some of us, too, unable perhaps to tell truly what is excellent, have found his interior designing unsatisfactory to our misguided senses.

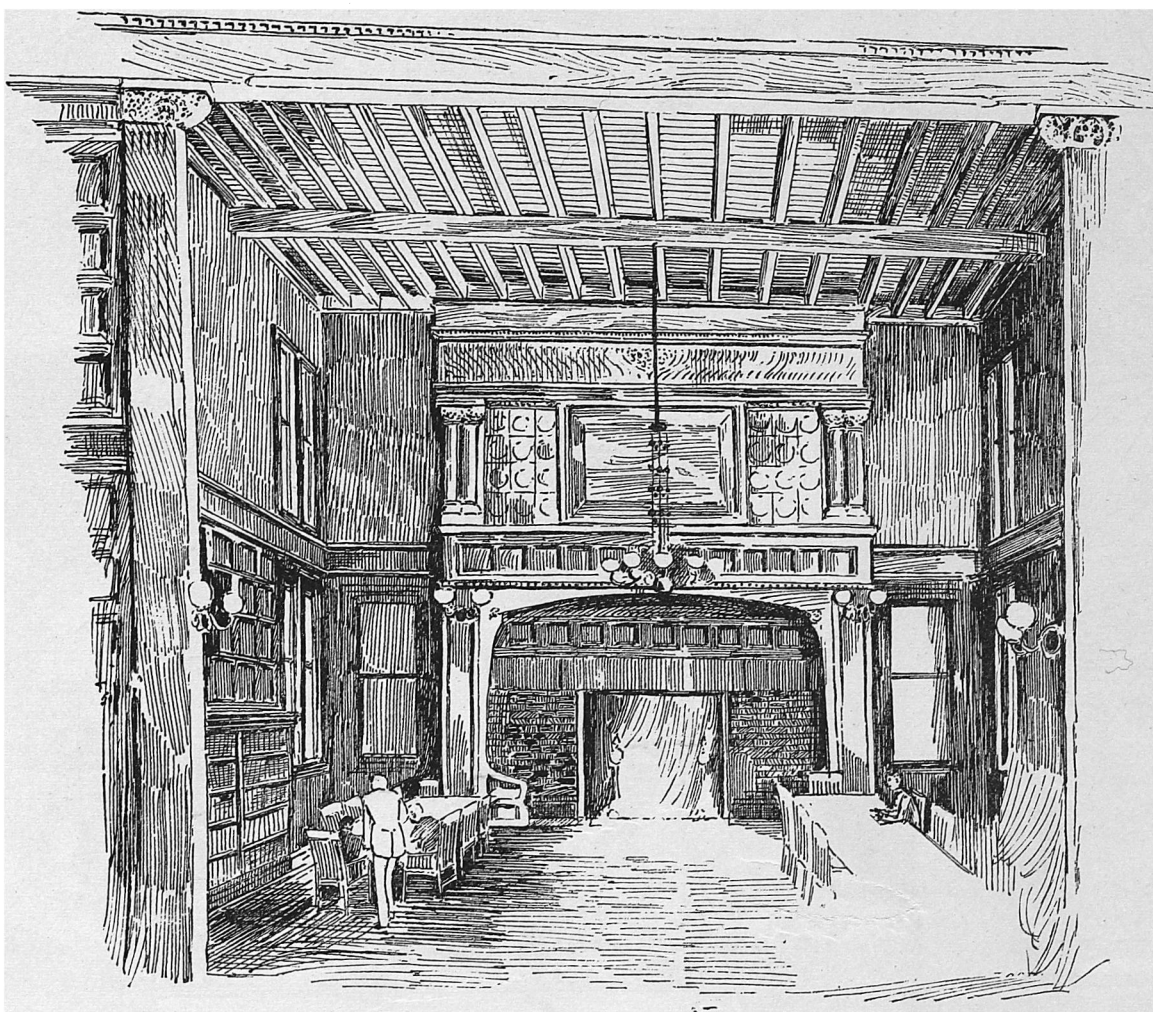
To some such causes as these must be ascribed the fact that, while Richardson's influence is daily growing as a master motive, in the outside design of buildings, we yet wait to see the same force leavening with equal truth, beauty and power the general character of the work produced by our interior designers. Here and there, of course, are signs of an awakening, and there can be little doubt of the ultimate trend of our best work toward an era of thoughtfulness, purity and usefulness. I do not mean that our good work must needs be Richardsonian or Romanesque or Byzantine, but that it must be as fully based on æsthetic freedom and good sense as was Richardson's work. It is not the Romanesqueness of his creations which makes them so good. The beauty of the historical style and the charm of a powerful, romantic individuality suffusing it form but the correlatives of an order of design necessarily good and independent of all styles. But,

ors are, I think, within natural limitations, true of his interiors. He always sought the simplest, most utilitarian solution for the problems with which he had to deal, and then he made his solutions elegant with the instinct



CHAIR AND TABLE, BY RICHARDSON, IN THE CRANE LIBRARY, QUINCY, MASS.

and knowledge of a born master. His art was simple, rational, monumental, concerned chiefly with great masses and proportions, broad spaces of color, eternal forms, and only secondarily with decoration, thus realiz-



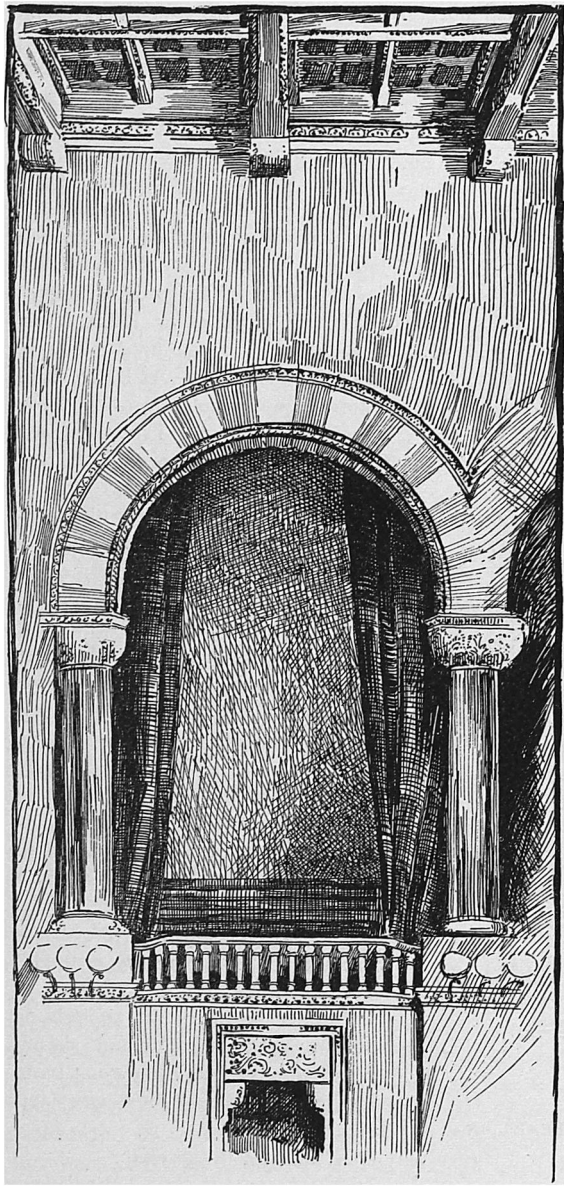
READING-ROOM IN THE CONVERSE MEMORIAL LIBRARY, MALDEN, MASS. DESIGNED BY RICHARDSON.

indeed, it seems that the Romanesque style is especially suited to be the inspirational medium of the national American architecture, if such there is ever to be.

The great qualities predicable of Richardson's exteri-

ing the highest law as to the relationship of construction and decoration. His decoration, however, though thus applied, belongs organically to his compositions. He properly treated his interiors not as things sui generis,

but as architectural entities, never good or laudable unless so treated. The mistake of a legion of others appears, by contrast, to be a handling of interiors, as



SECTION OF ARCADE, SENATE CHAMBER, IN THE NEW CAPITOL, ALBANY, N. Y. DESIGNED BY RICHARDSON.

things to be made nice, bizarre or gaudy on the piecemeal plan. In conformity with the first law of good interiors, we find in the work of Richardson harmony with the whole spirit of the edifice. Next we find his hand preserving harmony between all the parts of a given interior—both constructive and decorative harmony; giving great structural parts their due emphasis; giving details full and sufficient body, and using them solely to accentuate construction; evoking quietness alike from the most meagre and the most sumptuous resources. In contrast, how often do we see in the work of contemporaries harmony ignored, depths and spaces cut up and ruined, detail reproduced, which, however refined, is neither consistent nor proportioned, and fails to call out honest statements of fact. Fancy what elaborations without beauty such hands would have made, say, of the posts separating the alcoves of the Crane library; or imagine what they would have produced in place of Richardson's honest and thoroughly satisfactory, though unlabored, chairs and tables of the Converse library.

A lesson to be derived, in passing, is, that the infinite pains involved by carving, chamfering, profiling and so on do not necessarily imply beauty. In spite of exuberant and often finely wrought detail, the heart grows sick of so much modern work; of covering

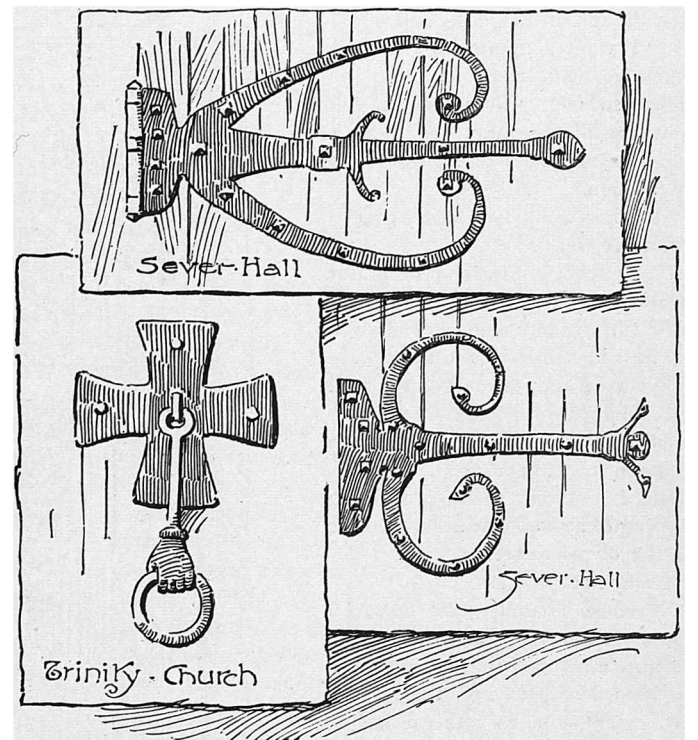
all spaces and vertical and horizontal members with enrichments; of destroying large projections by crude divisions into small members, however delicately profiled. Compare the best products of the Rococo with the grand lines of the mantel in the Malden library, and see how the former fails to attain with lavish ornateness what the latter reaches with the simplest effort. Yet, that richness is not beyond the scope of this severer style may be seen in the fireplace and the judge's desk in the Court of Appeals' room of the New Capitol, or in the mantel of Mr. Anderson's house in Washington, or in the many other examples which might be adduced. In these we have new and effective ornament, carefully designed, exquisitely proportioned, consummately appropriate, and deriving its proper force from its subordination to the object to which it has been applied. This is a great way ahead of the five orders and Vignola.

From simple utility and quiet elegance, as in the Crane library and the Converse memorial, to the monumental magnificence of the New Capitol interiors, there is a comprehensive scale of public and domestic decorative schemes from which our professional decorators may learn the most valuable lessons in ornamental art. For simple and grand dignity, I know of nothing—after a few mediæval examples—finer than that in the reading-room in the Austin Hall of Harvard University. This—which some cavillers may well be pleased to term a piece of barbaric horse-play—is mainly a lintel and a couple of great boulders, roughly sculptured, and resting on plain brick piers, and it has all the strength and nobility of inspiration direct from primitive sources.

No touch of the man-milliner or the jig-saw here; no niggling mouldings or sprawling incrustations of architecture appliqué. In a different place, as in his studio at Brookline, we can see how cordially and socially he could build for the home interior.

Richardson has been accused of meagreness. Only the blind can level such a charge against a genius which, when permitted to indulge its free will, produced some of the noblest creations of architectonic art in modern times, and, indeed, as Hubert Herkomer enthusiastically declared, in any time. His Senate Chamber at Albany shows what Richardson's

for piecemeal ornamentation. We have here, first of all, main lines of structure; then accessory lines; and finally decoration in broad surfaces, and, of course, in details. The walls consist of great horizontal bands of Knoxville marble and Mexican onyx. The ceiling is of oak, coffered, lavishly carved and touched with color. A superb arcade of Sienna marble cuts off a section of the room at either end. This room denotes the high-water mark of American decoration. Though built and decorated on a grand scale, the precepts it teaches are of universal significance in decorative art.

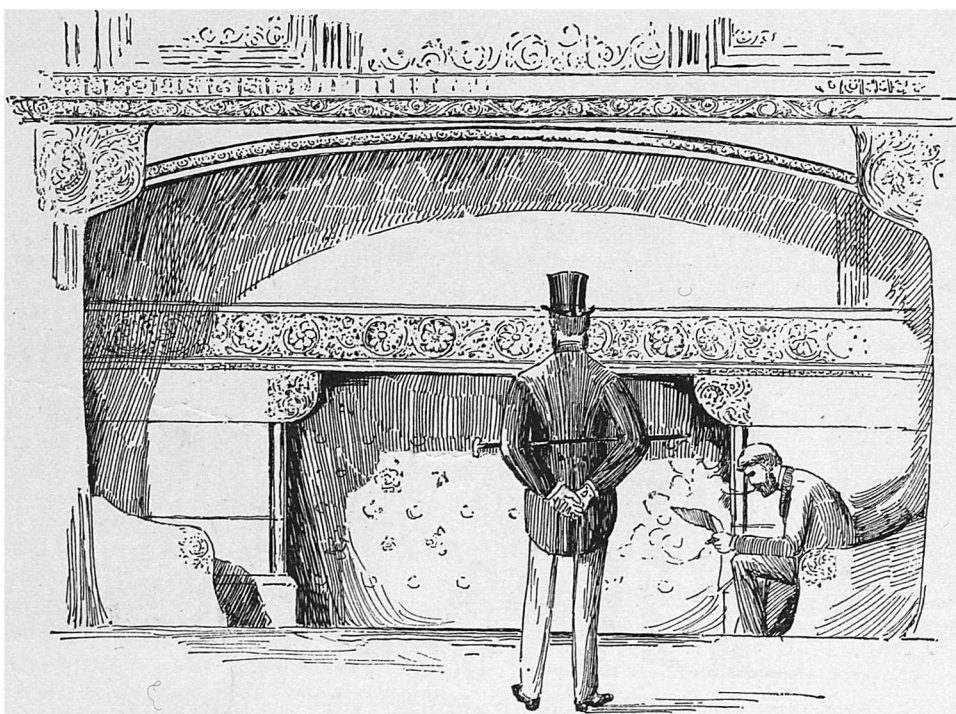


IRON-WORK. DESIGNED BY RICHARDSON.

Another favorite fling at Richardson's work, adduced always by detractors grown supercilious in their pride of conventional knowledge, was his contempt for mere canons and precedents. These people cannot, in the nature of things, admire independent art. To them such a performance as, for instance, The Lodge, at North Easton, is a "barbaric yaup." It is certainly a curious sight—that of an architect whose only palpable use for the rigid formalistic discipline of the Beaux Arts was to forget or outgrow it all. This ignoring of tradition and precept outcrops in all his work—especially in his interiors and furniture, which are referable to hardly any historic style, but to the style of good sense simply. An analogous criticism may be made as to his furniture. His chairs, tables, settees, are not bad copies or reminiscences of Chippendale, or Talbert, or Eastlake; they are just perfect adaptations of means to ends without added jimcrackery.

The purely decorative part of Richardson's work—as his capitals, friezes, cornices, bands, mouldings—for the most part recalls Byzantine forms. The latter are extremely adaptable, graceful, rich, and in refreshing contrast with the effete forms fished up from the slums of every petty style vaunted in England or France since the good days of the Renaissance passed away. Designers will be vastly benefited by close study of these enrichments, and should note that however faithfully the Byzantine spirit is followed in them, they are none the less original. Richardson's decorative detail is wonderfully untaught, and shows how much more extensive is the vocabulary of nature—from which he directly drew—than that of the schools. Even his door-pulls, hinges, and the like tell of the power which dwells in natural as apart from conventional art feeling.

H. GILLETTE CLARKE.



FIREPLACE, BY RICHARDSON, IN THE COURT OF APPEALS, NEW CAPITOL, ALBANY, N. Y.

design could evolve when almost wholly unfettered. This truly magnificent room illustrates well what I have hinted as to the folly of considering interiors as things